

FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT

According to the most recent National Long Term Care Survey, over seven million people are informal caregivers, i.e.,



spouses, adult children, other relatives and friends who provide unpaid help to older people living in the community with at least one limitation in their activities of daily living. The survey showed that caregivers devote on average 20 hours a week providing

care for an older person and even more time when the older person has multiple disabilities. According to the survey, if the work of these caregivers had to be replaced by paid home care staff, the cost to our nation would be \$45-75 billion per year. Looking at it from the elders' point of view, 95% of those who live in the community and need assistance with activities of daily living have family members involved in their care.

This degree of caregiver involvement has remained fairly constant over more than a decade. It attests to the remarkable resilience of the American family in taking care of its older relatives despite increased geographic separation, greater numbers of women in the workforce, and other changes in family life.

While family caregiving has saved government and tax payers huge amounts of money, the costs to caregivers themselves—in terms of time, physical and emotional stress, and financial burdens—can be significant.

These long-unsung heroes of family life—these caregivers who take care of elderly family members or friends and often feel forgotten by our system of social services—can now receive some of the support that they themselves need.

Through the Older Americans Act, the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) has been developed by the Administration on Aging (AoA) after listening to the needs expressed by hundreds of family caregivers in discussions held across America.

The program offers five basic services for family caregivers:

- ◇ Information to caregivers about available services,
- ◇ Assistance to caregivers in gaining access to these supportive services,
- ◇ Individual counseling, organizing of support programs, and training to assist the caregiver. Training may be available to teach caregivers the skills, knowledge and behaviors that they need for helping themselves,
- ◇ Respite care to enable caregivers to get temporary relief from their caregiving responsibilities, and
- ◇ Supplemental services, on a limited basis, to complement the care provided by caregivers.

This program can assist two groups of caregivers:

- 1) those who are supporting persons 60 years of age and older who are in greatest social and economic need—with particular attention to low-income, minority individuals; and
- 2) grandparents or other older relatives 60 and over who are raising children under the age of 19.

The Older Americans Act also establishes the Native American Caregiver Support Program to assist caregivers of Native American elders who are chronically ill or have disabilities.

For more information about this program, contact your local county or tribal aging unit.